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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000398

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS ABOUT VOTERS' ROLL AND EXTRA BALLOTS MOUNT

REF: A. 03 LILONGWE 1202

[B](#). LILONGWE 375

[C](#). LILONGWE 381

[1](#)1. (U) As the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) began distributing ballots on May 12, opposition parties expressed grave concerns about the MEC's distribution of all 7.3 million ballots, rather than a reduced number based on the updated voters' roll of 5.7 million (reftel C). According to MEC Chair Justice James Kalaile, MEC does not have adequate time to re-allocate and re-package ballots based on the new voters' roll numbers. To ensure the proper management of the ballots, Kalaile said political parties will have the opportunity to inspect ballots once they arrive at district offices. Unsatisfied by MEC's provisions to prevent rigging, political party representatives and civil society leaders continue to advocate for the extra ballots to be either destroyed or kept in a secure location.

[1](#)2. (U) MEC officials also denied requests for an analysis of the computerized voters' roll at the parliamentary district and polling station levels, which was requested because of suspicions that the number of voters in opposition parliamentary districts may have been wrongly reduced. MEC officials said they will only release the district level statistics about the number of voters removed from the original voters' roll of 6.6 million. Opposition leaders are concerned that opposition areas within certain districts may have unfairly treated in the clean-up process.

[1](#)3. (U) As complaints and skepticism about the voters' roll mount, the courts began hearing on May 12 the Mgwirizano Coalition's legal petition for postponement of the elections until a proper clean-up of the voters' roll can be completed in order to allow the mandated 21 days inspection before polling day (reftel C). A ruling is expected May 14.

COMMENT

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[1](#)4. (SBU) Continued problems with the voters' roll and the extra ballots at voting centers give rise to legitimate concerns of potential rigging. With ballots already distributed though, a postponement of the elections could open the process to other problems. That, along with the lateness of the hour, would make a judicial decision to postpone a risky and costly move.

BROWNING